Evaluation Report Of The Challenge Program County of Strathcona #20

Warren D. Wilde
Melvin T. Sillito

Alberta Education

Alberta
EDUCATION

87-02738/

EVALUATION REPORT
OF THE
CHALLENGE PROGRAM
COUNTY OF STRATHCONA #20

Warren D. Wilde

Melvin T. Sillito

Prepared Under Contract to Alberta Education

October 1986

ABSTRACT

Evaluation Report of the Challenge Program, County of Strathcona #20, Wilde, Warren D. and Sillito, Melvin T., October 1985, (53 pp.).

The report is one of a triad of formative evaluations in each of three school systems of dissimilar size in Alberta. The three, Camrose School District #1315, Strathcona County #20, and Calgary Board of Education, formed a consortium and jointly with Alberta Education sponsored a project to develop and test promising evaluation procedures of programs for gifted students as well as gather information about evaluating gifted students. The consortium provided the venue for field tryout plus other assistance. Alberta Education provided financial support supplemented with expert advice.

Strathcona County school system, consisting of a mix of rural and small urban schools, is intermediate in size between Camrose and Calgary. Its program consists of 90 to 100 grade five and six students in a partial pull-out program, which is located in 9 centers (9 of the 19 schools) and serves all identified students. Two half days per week are allotted to each pull-out class. Teachers have an additional half day per week for preparation. The report includes: a history of the project (from 1977), a description, identification, curricula, organization, and administration. It concludes with findings and recommendations about: program extension to other grade levels and to visual and performing arts, increased attention to creativity, evaluation in the affective domain, and increased attention to teacher and administrator concerns.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I INTRODUCTION 1

II PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND PLAN 1

III EVALUATION DATA

1. Challenge Teacher Interviews 24

2. Counselor Interviews 32

3. Principal Interviews 35

4. Current Student Interviews 39

5. Former Student Interviews 43

6. Interviews with Parents of Current and Former Students 44

IV SUMMARY and CONCLUSIONS 46

V RECOMMENDATIONS 51

I INTRODUCTION

This evaluation was begun as a part of a project to determine the similarities and differences which exist in programs for gifted children at varied stages of development among three dissimilarly sized districts in the province of Alberta. The three districts involved in the study are Camrose School District #1315, County of Strathcona #20, and Calgary Board of Education. As a result of this study suggestions will be forthcoming about program development and evaluation.

Information in this report was gathered from documents in the school district and from interviews with several participants. There were interviews with the Associate Superintendent and supervisor of the program, Grant Jensen, and the Program Coordinator, Marilyn Macyk, both of whom provided insight into the organizational framework and set up contacts within the school district. Teachers, school principals, students currently enrolled in the program and children who had been in the program in previous years were interviewed. A sample of the parents was asked to express their views during interviews in person or by telephone. There was willing cooperation from all participants to help with this evaluation. This report is an analysis of the data collected and of the recommendations offered.

II PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND PLAN

Special programs of education for gifted students usually have a setting in which there is a growing awareness of need by parents and the school board, a readiness by professional staff to develop a program and some triggering event. In Strathcona County, the triggering came about as a result of a school principal taking leave to pursue a master's degree in education administration. It was an expectation that some utilitarian product of the study leave would accrue to the county. In this particular instance the product was in

the area of education for gifted students. The principal reported to the board and made a proposal. The board approved the proposal by establishing a planning committee. The committee propcsed the plan which was subsequently approved in November 1977 as Strathcona County Board of Education Guidelines For The Operation Of A Challenge Program. The plan included: a "Definition Of The Gifted Child", "A Rationale", a "Proposal As Accepted By The Board", "Goals Of The Program", "Program Objectives", "Individual Objectives", "Criteria For The Selection Of Students", "Selection Procedure", "Organization And Operation Of Classes", "Procedures And Methodology" (excerpted from the Edmonton Public School Board gifted program documentation), "Materials", and "Evaluation".

The following definition is widely used (although frequently expanded in other settings by specifying areas of giftedness), and remains unchanged in current guidelines.

> Gifted and talented children are those who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society.

The rationale behind the definition is that the needs of gifted children, like the needs of students unable to cope with the regular program, are not met in the usual classroom experiences provided.

The Pilot Program Proposed

The proposal was for a pilot program of two classrooms, with ten students in each, one in Fort Saskatchewan and one in Sherwood Park. The pilot program would be of two years duration and would involve students from grades four and five functioning at or beyond the 97 percentile level. In carrying out the pilot program, the first term was used as preparation time, the second introduced the program in grades four and five. During the next two terms grade six was added.

Program goals were related to expected student outcomes, i.e. a healthy self concept, development of the fullest potential, exploration of wider intellectual horizons, a sense of individual and community responsibility, a love of learning, and a desire to achieve excellence. The goals

have remained unchanged and are quoted in the section detailing the current Challenge Program, page 7.

Suggested program objectives were: extension of the curriculum, broadening student interests, reduction in drill activities, extension of curriculum beyond the school, provision of opportunities for students to manage their own time, provision of an emotionally secure atmosphere, group work, opportunity for self evaluation, exploration of career opportunities, and activities in creative thinking.

Individual objectives pertained to: creative and critical, or higher level thinking skills (Bloom), ability to question and express ideas fluently in oral and written modes, work with intellectual peers, data gathering skills, social skills, development of perseverance, decision making, forecasting, and predicting.

Revisions

Subsequent revisions of the guidelines usually recorded changes already put into effect rather than providing a blueprint of changes which were to follow.

Criteria for entrance to the Challenge Program were modified. The incidence goal of 3% was dropped prior to 1983. The I.Q. criterion was lowered from 130 to 125. A new criterion, "maintenance of an adequate level of achievement in regular classes", was added. In general the criteria were such as to select intellectually able, high performing, motivated, independently capable, mature students. The changes noted tended to reinforce the student performance criteria while slightly reducing the I.Q. criterion.

Most of the changes in the 1977-83 period were made in selection procedures. The 1977 procedures called for selection from grades four and five in those schools involved in the pilot program; by 1983 the selection procedures which targeted students in grades five and six were system wide with very few exceptional students from grade four. In 1977 the initial referral was made by teachers to their principal; by 1983 the principal could designate someone else to receive referrals. Further assessment in 1977 was done by the counselor on the basis of classroom performance, group achievement and intelligence tests, and an individual I.Q. test. By 1983 additional assessment was done by the counselor in consultation with the principal based on the same criteria but with the addition of teacher referral information, report card marks,

student attitude information and an informal creativity assessment. Procedures in 1983 specified contact with parents to inform them that their child was being considered for the program and students had to complete the Creative Thinking Assignment. The counselor and principal, in 1977, made up the final school list. By 1983 this was the counselor's duty, normally in consultation with the principal, to compile a prioritized list on the basis of "student need". In 1977 the final selection committee included those principals involved, the (two) Challenge teachers, school counselors and a school system representative from pupil services. In the 1983 document the Challenge coordinator was added. (The coordinator had been appointed and acting since 1979 and was in fact the school system representative). By 1983 Challenge student files, which at one time were expected to be established in the system office, were maintained in the schools. Parental permission to enroll successful candidates in the Challenge Program has continued to be required.

The "Organization and Operation of Classes" section of the guidelines was unchanged over the six year period. In essence this section: reminded Challenge teachers that the students were of a nature to be subject to stress, stated that an anecdotal record should be kept on each student, suggested close communication with parents and homeroom teachers, verified that Challenge students are in the jurisdiction of the principal in whose school they were taking classes whether Challenge or regular, and that guidance, whether in group sessions or individually, should aim toward acceptance of self and others.

"Procedures and Methodology" in the 1977 document was a borrowing from Edmonton Public School, but procedures were continuously changed. In 1983 this section was revised to reflect current practice in the school system and was also expanded into a curriculum model. The Challenge Program was expected to deal with creativity, research, critical thinking, oral communication, and cultural awareness. Materials used would feature the five basic curriculum areas, mathematics, language arts, social studies, science, and fine arts. Curriculum units would promote student motivation, individual and group work, oral communication, good study habits, development of effective thinking, use of the scientific method, skill in using both school and community resources, and development of creative abilities.

The two brief sections on "Material" and "Evaluation" in the 1977 guidelines were dropped by 1983 and a new section "Re-Evaluation Policy" was added. This new section reiterated keeping anecdotal records and addressed the

possible reasons for, and procedures attendant on removing students from the program.

The Pilot Programs

The guidelines formed the foundation and frame-work for implementing a program. Following the planning term of the pilot stage about 20 identified students in grades 4 and 5 attended two classes, one in Sherwood Park and one in Fort Saskatchewan. The program was a partial pull-out for two half days per week. The Challenge teachers, selected largely by the host principals, were encouraged to find their own materials and were given some help and supervision by the supervisor of special education. Six months after implementation, the first evaluation was conducted. The evaluation showed a very favorable response from students and parents alike. Teachers' opinion that everything was running smoothly was not supported by students and parents who drew attention to the excessive load on students in that, either from external sources or themselves, they were under pressure to complete all of their regular class assignments as well as the work in the Challenge classes.

Program Changes

After the first implementation term of the pilot period, the program was expanded to grades four, five and six, system wide, (since reduced to grades five and six with only a very few, very exceptional grade four students) with a number of additional Challenge classes established. In this period, curriculum materials acquisitions were expanded and other local curriculum units developed, the position of coordinator for the Challenge Program was established and filled. The county offices housed the materials resource center, filling in part at least, some of the Challenge teachers' needs for help in their search for appropriate curriculum materials. The coordinator: supervised acquisition and distribution of materials, provided inservice education to Challenge teachers, facilitated exchange of professional information among Challenge teachers, promoted joint consideration of common problems by conducting monthly meetings, and encouraged communication with other teachers.

By April 1984 there were 96 students in the program and in September 1984 the ninth Challenge class was established, making the provision for gifted students accessible throughout the county.

Inservice

Inservice education had a role in the program's history. In the pre-planning stage, the principals who were to be involved in the pilot phase were sponsored at a variety of conferences and workshops designed to provide them with an orientation in education of gifted students. Outside experts were also brought in to provide further direction. As additional Challenge teachers were appointed, inservice activities were provided. When a coordinator was appointed she also undertook a continuing program of inservice work with teachers. This work continues although the coordinator position incumbent has changed a number of times.

Program Evaluation

A number of evaluations have been conducted since the first evaluation of the pilot program in 1978. Reports from 1981, 1982 and 1984 confirmed strong and continuing support for the Challenge Program. The 1981 report indicated that students were happy in the program and parents agreed that students were better served. Challenge teachers thought the model used (partial pull-out) was appropriate and provided a number of benefits to students, notably in affective learning areas. Parents by a 69 - 1 count felt in retrospect that they had made the right choice by placing their child in the program. The single demurrer "supposed" the choice had been right. The 1984 evaluation showed that nearly all grade six students enjoyed the program and about half would like to have it extended into junior high school. Nearly three quarters experienced no problems with friends as a result of participation. Over 80% of former Challenge students would have participated in a similar program if it had been available.

In the evaluations some problems were noted. These included:

1) extra homework and "keeping-up" pressure on Challenge students,

2) need to expand the Challenge Program to a wider range of grades,

3) need to investigate methods for formal evaluation of students' progress,

4) need to provide for the talented, and

5) need to provide enrichment for some students not selected for the Challenge Program.

The evaluations have mainly been concerned with documenting support for the program, based on perceptions and opinions of parents, students and Challenge teachers, although in the process the pull-out form of the program was confirmed and a number of problems identified. The evaluation component of the Challenge Program has not been formalized in the guidelines.

The 1984 - 85 Challenge Program

The current (November 1983) guidelines form the foundation and framework for the Challenge Program in 1984 - 85 and reflect its history.

Guidelines for Challenge Classes - Elementary

Definition of the Gifted Child

Gifted and talented children are those who, by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance. These are children who require differentiated educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society.

A. Goals of the Program

(Goals and Objectives are designed to give purpose and direction to the program. They are not absolute and should be modified and revised when necessary.)

1. To help each participating gifted child gain a realistic and healthy concept of himself, his strengths, weaknesses, areas of needed improvement and potentialities.

2. To provide an educational program which will encourage each gifted child to develop his abilities to the fullest potential.

3. To expose the student to wider and further intellectual horizons which can be pursued throughout his learning career.

4. To develop in the student an understanding of the meaning, responsibilities, and benefits of active citizenship at the local, national and international levels.

5. To develop in each student a love of learning and the desire to achieve excellence.

B. Program Objectives

While individual teachers emphasize some objectives more than others, all programs are designed to encourage most or all of the following points.

1. To provide extensions of the required curriculum in depth and breadth.

2. To develop and broaden the students' interests.

3. To drill only as needed and to provide increased time for application of facts and data.

4. To extend classroom experiences outside the school whenever and wherever possible as required by areas of study within the Challenge Program.

5. To increase the student's opportunity to budget his time and plan his activities.

6. To provide an atmosphere where a student can "fail safely" and thus profit from his decision-making by learning from past errors.

7. To provide many opportunities for shared planning and decision-making.

8. To encourage student self-evaluation through a continuous guidance program.

9. To develop an awareness of career opportunities through the exploration of alternatives at various stages.

10. To provide for activities which allow for:
    a) the elaboration and generalization of ideas.
    b) the generation of new ideas.
    c) the extension of learnings to related learnings at higher levels of complexity.
    d) the application of generalizations to new subjects and/or concepts.
    e) the identification of what must still be discovered.

C. Individual Objectives

1. To develop the ability to think convergently, divergently (creatively) and evaluatively.

2. To develop the ability to generalize accurately from what has been learned and to apply generalizations effectively to new, unusual situations.

3. To develop the ability to think critically and to distinguish fact from opinion.

4. To learn to frame questions with the clarity and specificity necessary to obtain needed information.

5. To develop the ability to express ideas clearly and fluently, both written and orally.

6. To extend opportunities to share and develop ideas through discussions with others of related ability.

7. To become proficient with the techniques of locating, gathering, organizing and reporting information and data.

8. To develop the quality of perseverance.

9. To develop the ability to listen to and work well with others.

10. To develop an understanding and respect for the importance of the interdependence of man.

11. To learn to base decisions on investigation of alternatives and consideration of their possible consequences.

D. Criteria for Entrance to Challenge Classes*

The student will demonstrate some or all of these characteristics:

1. Superior intellectual ability as obtained on an individually administered intelligence test (I.Q. of 125).

2. Superior academic achievement. Preferably one and one-half to two years above grade level in total reading score as measured by the Canadian Achievement Test.

3. Adequate social and emotional maturity.

4. Ability to work independently with little rigid discipline.

5. Enjoyment of intellectual challenges; performs well on difficult tasks.

6. Maintenance of a satisfactory level of achievement in the regular classroom.

* Every student may not fit into all of these criteria.

E. Selection Procedures

1. Children in grades five and six are eligible for placement in the Challenge Program. Selections are finalized in June of each year. Therefore selection procedures apply to students presently in grades four and five. Consideration may be given to a very few children with exceptionally high ability and advanced maturity presently in grade three.

2. Initial referrals are made to the principal or designate. (Teacher Referral forms are available from the Forms Control Department, County Office.) It is recommended that these initial teacher referrals be completed by mid-March.

3. The principal and/or counselor then select suitable candidates from the referrals based on the following information:
   a) teacher referral
   b) report card marks
   c) results of group achievement or group intelligence tests (e.g. CAT or CCAT)
   d) individual intelligence test scores (WISC-R)
   e) student attitude.

4. The counselor contacts parents and students to determine their support of the referral for possible placement in the Challenge Program. Please stress that candidacy does not ensure placement.

5. The WISC-R is administered to all candidates who have not been tested in the past two years.

6. Each possible candidate completes the Creative Thinking Assignment in the classroom with teacher supervision. (Available from Forms Control Department, County Office, Extension 219.)

7. The final Information Summary is completed by the counselor. Candidates are ranked according to need. Children whose needs have been recognized and are being met elsewhere may be given low priority or eliminated.

8. Copies of the following are sent to the Challenge Coordinator:
   a) Information Summary Form
   b) CAT Student Test Record
   c) Teacher Referral Form
   d) Student Assignment

9. Area selection committee meetings are held during May. The selection committees are composed of the principals and counselors and a representative from Pupil Services.

10. When class lists are finalized, accepted candidates and their parents are contacted by the counselor.* Parental permission, in writing, must be obtained and kept in the student's Cumulative Record File.

* Parents must be informed that they are responsible for their child's transportation to the Challenge class.

F. Organization and Operation of Classes

1. Since by definition, the child in these classes will be highly motivated to achieve, the teacher should be aware of and particularly watch for any signs of stress. Such symptoms should be immediately noted and reported to the principal and parents.

2. An individual anecdotal record should be kept for each student to aid the teacher in assessing the value of the program for the student.

3. It is expected that the teacher will maintain close contact with the parents and homeroom teachers of the students. Consultation time should be provided for conferences with homeroom teachers.

4. When attending Challenge classes, students are placed under the jurisdiction of the principals of the receiving schools. Should difficulties arise with a particular student his home principal should be notified.

5. Individual and group guidance should play an important part in the curriculum for these children. Such guidance should aim toward developing self-acceptance, and particularly, acceptance of others. If recognition and

acceptance of their own limitations and abilities are developed, these children may gain a better understanding of their peer group.

G. Procedures and Methodology

The Challenge Program deals with five main areas. These areas are: creative training, research, critical thinking, oral communication, and cultural awareness. They are not independent of the regular school program. Within the context of the Challenge Program they are extended and refined to foster intellectual development of the Challenge students. These areas are to be used to develop new skills and methods which improve the student's abilities. With the acquisition of new processes and concepts, new knowledge will also be developed.

Materials used to develop the processes and concepts should fall within the five basic subject areas of the school curriculum. These are Mathematics, Language Arts, Social Studies, Science and Fine Arts. They should provide for individual interests and talents of the students in the program and at the same time cover subject areas missed from the regular classroom. Curriculum units and other materials used by the Challenge Program teachers are expected to:

1. Motivate the child's abilities and interests by providing activities which present both a challenge and purpose.

2. Provide the opportunities for both individual and group projects to enable the student to develop a deeper understanding of himself and others and to enable him/her to recognize the importance of cooperative efforts.

3. Provide opportunities for the development of effective oral communication skills through the student's participation in discussions, seminars, debates, and panel discussions.

4. Provide the opportunity for the development and/or acquisition of good study habits, specifically good library habits, efficient use of dictionaries, encyclopedias, world almanacs and other reference books, taking effective notes and organizing them into unified, coherent reports, writing outlines and summaries, writing and presenting systematically developed and organized reports.

5. Provide opportunities for the development of effective thinking so that activities for critical thinking,

abstract reasoning, analysis of problems/situations, recognition of fact, opinion and propaganda/bias are offered.

6. Provide opportunities for the use of the scientific method in both individual and group projects, i.e. clarifying a problem, consulting and evaluating various authorities, observing, testing hypotheses, planning and carrying out experiments, withholding judgements until sufficient information is available, then making conclusions.

7. Provide the opportunities for the student to utilize all the resources that are available within the school and community.

8. Provide for the development of creative abilities to enable the student to produce original, unique and divergent thinking in both oral and written expression.

[The above (#1-8) are from the Edmonton Public School Board.]

H. Student Re-Evaluation Policy

1. Teachers should maintain an anecdotal record on each child to aid in assessing the value of the program for the student.

2. The Challenge teacher and program coordinator should reassess the student's needs, as well as the materials and strategies being implemented in the event that:
   a) the program's structure, goals and objectives do not meet the student's needs;
   b) his social and/or emotional maturity regress;
   c) there is a decline in task motivation and the ability to work independently in Challenge class;
   d) a satisfactory level of achievement is not maintained in the homeroom class.

3. If there is a need for student re-evaluation, the Challenge class teacher, principals of the respective schools, guidance counselor, and Program Coordinator should then assess the problem and make a decision in the best interest of the student involved.

4. In all cases of re-evaluation, the parents must be contacted and be involved in the final decision (to modify the program, remove the student from the program, etc.).

Identification and Selection

Classroom teachers initiate the identification process (usually in March) by completing a referral form on each student they consider to be a suitable candidate for the Challenge Program. The referral is made to the school principal or designee. The school counselor completes the information on each student referred and administers an individual I.Q. test unless it has already been done in the past year or so. The counselor prioritizes the list according to the student's needs and also, in consultation with the principal and other teachers, prepares the final school list. The next step is to finalize the list for each Challenge class. This is done by the area selection committee consisting of principals or designates, counselors, Challenge teachers, a representative from pupil services (currently the Challenge coordinator). The final step is to inform parents (who previously had been advised their child was being considered for the Challenge Program) that their child has been selected. The school obtains written permission for the child's participation. One hundred and eleven students are included in the nine Challenge classes. There are six from grade four, 51 from grade five and 54 from grade six. The proportions of grade five and six students enrolled is 5.8%. Not all of the students identified as gifted are enrolled in a Challenge class since committees have determined that some students' needs may be best met in other programs.

Curriculum

A model based on four major components, adapted from work by George Betts, serves as a basis for curriculum activities. The four components are:

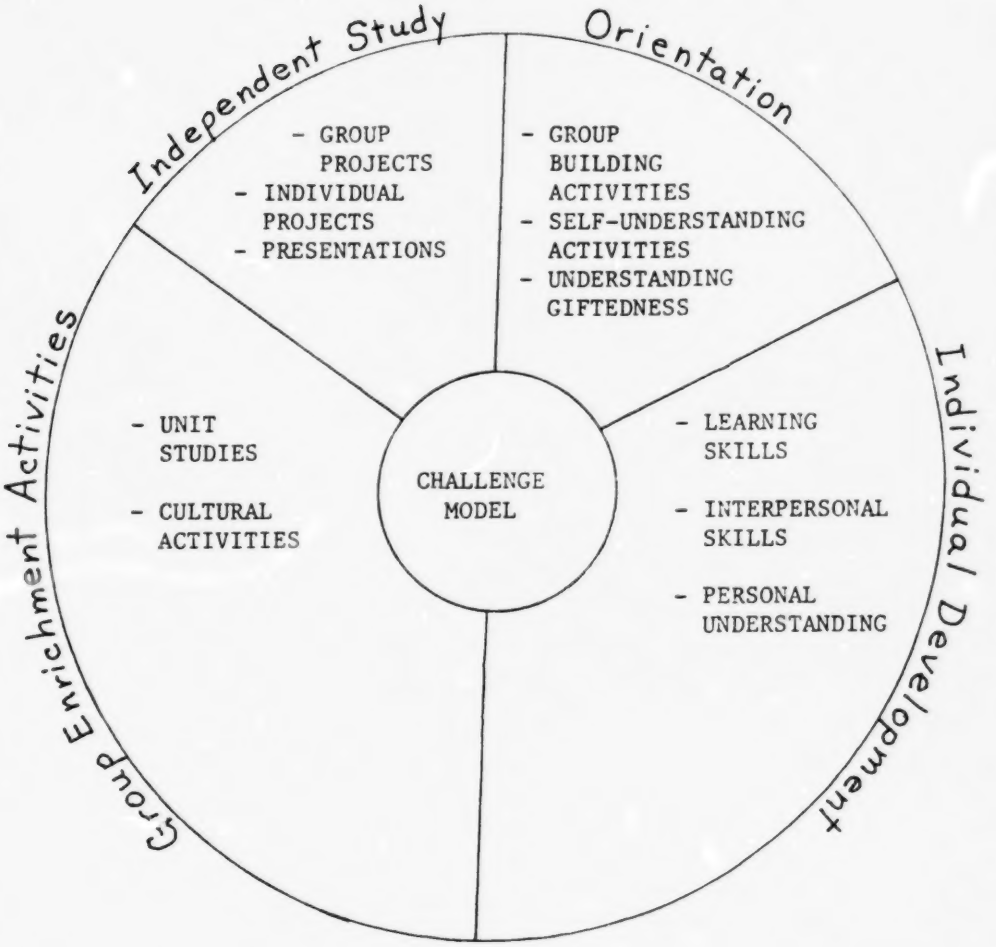
1. Orientation.
   This encourages the child to become a member of the group and to feel comfortable in various situations. The nature of giftedness is explored and the child's involvement is mediated.

2. Individual development.
   This encourages and assists the student to develop both cognitive and affective skills and concepts which lead to greater personal effectiveness and pursuit of personal interests.

3. Group enrichment activities.
   This encourages the student to explore more broadly, going beyond his own acquaintances, neighbors, and his own field of cognitive interests.

4. Independent study.
   This serves to enrich and accelerate the education of the gifted student. The student learns to discover on his own, to explore in as much depth as he wishes and in this way determine his own course of studies. The student becomes involved in studies of issues, themes, real-life problems and other knowledge of particular interest.

The following diagram suggests the overall concept of the curriculum suggested for gifted students in Strathcona County.



Each of the four areas are elaborated into what might serve as a curriculum guide. For example, unit studies becomes the following:

Unit Studies

Guided by the teacher, students participate in an in-depth study of a topic, issue or theme of interest to the entire class. The studies in this area emphasize the five categories:

Research Skills

Creative Training

Critical Thinking

Oral Communication

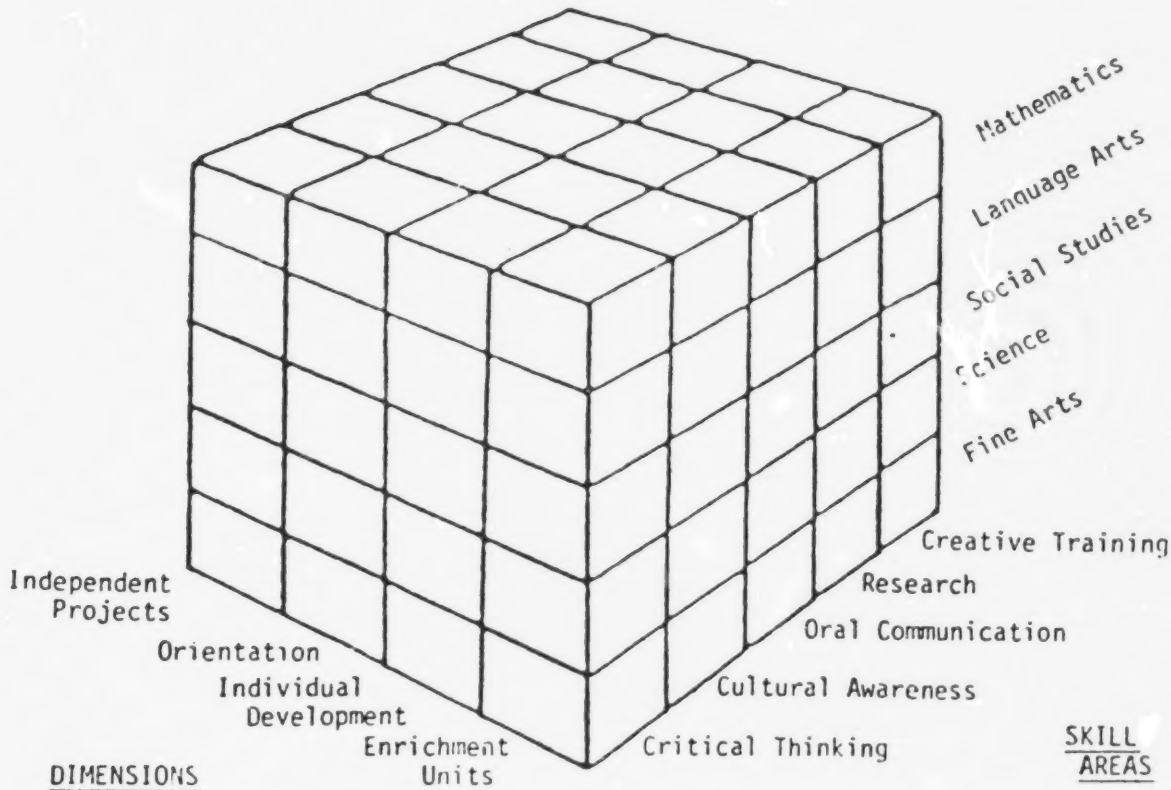
Cultural Awareness

Further direction to curriculum is provided in the following two diagramatic representations entitled "The Blends and Balances of Gifted Programming" and "The Challenge Program", both prepared by David Harvey, a Challenge teacher.

THE BLENDS AND BALANCES OF GIFTED PROGRAMMING

Individual	⟷	Group
Product	⟷	Process
Competition	⟷	Cooperation
Affective	⟷	Cognitive
(Fun	⟷	Work)

The Challenge Program



Student Evaluation and Reporting

Challenge teachers are encouraged and assisted in a number of ways in their responsibility for assessing student outcomes and reporting to parents. Some direction is given in the system guidelines. "Teachers should maintain an anecdotal record on each student to aid in assessing the value of the program for the student." Teachers are also encouraged to monitor Challenge students' progress in regular classes and to meet with the regular classroom teachers prior to reporting student progress to parents. Both of these suggestions are becoming common practice. There are two parent interview and reporting times regularly scheduled, one in November and one in March. A year-end report is made on a form developed by the Challenge coordinator and teachers. This eight page form, "Strathcona County Board of Education Challenge Class Report Card" is based entirely on teacher comments in five areas of expected student development. These are: 1) communication, 2) motivation, 3) creativity, 4) critical thinking, and 5) social. The information parents asked to receive has become a guideline of sorts to the extensiveness of teacher comments.

Teachers encounter some pressure to make assessments which are comparable and either quantified (%) or categorical (letter grades) as is usual in regular classes. The relatively small Challenge classes, coupled with the practice of making evaluation an ongoing procedure make it possible for Challenge teachers to know each student well and to record significant areas of progress. These practices make student evaluation and reporting to parents both acceptable and satisfactory in the great majority of instances.

A category of student outcomes, universally recognized by Challenge teachers as a major area of student development, encompasses the affective domain. This is variously spoken of as increased self and/or social confidence but from the stand point of creativity, it seems to be inadequately described by such indicators. In instance after instance what teachers seem to be describing is a synergistic integration of the increased affective attributes with the exceptional intellectual capacity and a consequent release of learning energy using such phrases as, "the student has come alive", "the student has broken out of a shell" or "caught fire...". It may be that this category of student outcome, though doubtless discussed in interviews, is insufficiently emphasized in light of its importance and is therefore largely unrecognized by those who make decisions about Challenge Programs.

Challenge teachers are exploring new ways of improving student evaluation. One practice makes use of evaluative interviews with the student(s) involved at the outset of a project and at other points during its course. Another uses students other than those involved in a project to engage in "formative" evaluation discussions.

As indicated in the quotation in the opening paragraph of this section, teachers are encouraged to maintain an anecdotal record "to aid in assessing the value of the program for the student". The 1983 Guidelines for Challenge Classes - Elementary (quoted above) which continued in effect through the 1984-85 school year, provided specific direction to the summative evaluation process for assessing student outcomes. The procedures could be invoked if the Challenge Program failed to meet the students' needs, or if emotional/social maturity regressed, motivation and ability to work independently decreased, or level of achievement in the regular classroom was not satisfactorily maintained.

The evaluation process should begin with the Challenge teacher and program coordinator reassessing the student's needs, materials and teaching strategies employed. If necessary, this step should be followed by an assessment by a group consisting of the above two persons augmented by the principal(s) involved and the guidance counselor. Parents are to be involved in the final decision which could include modifying the program or removing the student from the program. The latter action has rarely been taken.

Inservice

Ongoing inservice includes workshops conducted by the Challenge coordinator, regular monthly meetings of Challenge teachers with the coordinator and release and financial assistance to staff attending external conferences and workshops. The meeting agendas address the needs of Challenge teachers as well as provide opportunities for communication, problem solving, and curriculum development. Inservice activities to provide orientation for regular classroom teachers to the Challenge Program are under consideration.

Staff and Budget

Nine Challenge teachers each work 0.3 time, i.e. three half days per week in the program. They are given 0.1 time for preparation and teach the remainder. The Challenge coordinator is a half-time appointment. Each Challenge

Center is allotted an annual budget of $525.00 of which $375.00 is used for extra materials and/or activities such as field trips. The remaining $150.00 is administered centrally for special materials or activities. Parents provide the extra transportation necessary for their child to attend Challenge classes and special activities.

School Based Enrichment

An enrichment materials center was started in 1983 to assist elementary school principals in providing enrichment in regular classrooms. In part, this development came about because of unmet needs of non-challenge students which became obvious as a consequence of establishing the Challenge Program and the various evaluations thereof. Though not part of the Challenge Program, in its major features it parallels it. An in-school coordinator has been designated as a contact person for other teachers in the school. This school coordinator serves as a facilitator in the school and as a contact between central office and the school. There is no extra allocation of time provided. In-school enrichment activities may include mini-pull-outs, independent study and mentorships just as the Challenge Program might. Materials and advice on their use are available from the enrichment resources center. Challenge teachers frequently become involved as volunteers in enrichment activities and as resource personnel, in addition to providing more general inservice to other teachers in the schools.

Visual and Performing Arts

Strathcona County provides special opportunities in music on a system wide basis. An Honor Choir of 25 (to be increased to 40) is selected from grades four to seven on the basis of an audition by the system music supervisor. This choir meets about 35 times each year in addition to numerous performances. Other opportunities for vocal performances are provided through the elementary school music festival which is system wide and hosted by several schools over a ten day period. In addition, there are junior-senior high school solo and ensemble band performances which are scheduled annually for a Friday evening and Saturday. Both the festival and the junior-senior high school music event provide opportunities for instrumental music performances on an individual and group basis.

There are also two "honor" bands, one from the junior high and one from the senior high with the participants being

selected from the entire district by the band directors. These bands have only one performance annually with a practice the previous evening.

Art is a matter left to the schools to provide in regular classes and school based extracurricular activities.

Drama clubs flourish in some elementary schools and in all of the junior and senior high schools.

These provisions for music, art and drama are not part of the Challenge Program; students are not formally identified as gifted in these areas. Their specific needs are not assessed and, of course, the needs are not addressed in any systematic way. Gifted students do find their way into these prgrams however, reportedly in some numbers, and are doubtless benefited thereby.

Summary

Strathcona County Challenge Program plan has its basis in a rather global definition of giftedness. From the definition, by virtue of specific and detailed criteria for admission and identification procedures contained in guidelines, the focus appears to narrow to target students who have superior intelligence (I.Q. 125+), superior academic performance (97 percentile plus), are highly motivated, behave well, are mature and capable of maintaining satisfactory performance in their regular classroom as well as the Challenge class, and who are in grade five or six with a very few exceptional students from grade four. But just as the guidelines reflect rather than blueprint the changes in the program, so the selection procedures are beginning to change in ways which give added attention to creative abilities and personal needs of able students. It is likely that some future set of guidelines will reflect these changes which are currently in progress.

Students attend two half days of Challenge classes per week taught by Challenge teachers who are provided an additional half day for Challenge class preparation. Almost half of the elementary schools (9 out of 19) are called Challenge Centers because they house the Challenge classes and serve their own Challenge students along with those from nearby feeder schools.

Direction and focus is given to the curriculum for Challenge classes. Four curriculum dimensions are identified: Orientation, Individual Development, Group Enrichment Activities, and Independent Study. Further direction is

provided in guidelines on goals, program objectives, and individual objectives. Challenge Program dimensions, four in number, have been defined and related to content and skill areas. Finally, curriculum is given direction by the five areas identified for teacher comment on student report cards.

Evaluation of students' progress is left largely to Challenge teachers. It is based mainly on observation and anecdote. Reporting to parents is both oral in parent teacher interviews, and written as commentary on the system approved form. Program evaluation has been relatively frequent. However its frequency and procedures are not specified in the Challenge Program guidelines. This report is the result of the first external evaluation of the program. The other evaluations have been at the call of system administration and conducted internally.

III EVALUATION DATA

1. CHALLENGE TEACHER INTERVIEWS

There are currently nine teachers in the Challenge Program. They have varying amounts of experience with the program and with teaching. One teacher is the school principal and another is an assistant principal, while the school counselor serves as the Challenge teacher in still another. Length of teaching experience begins with a first-year teacher and length of time in the Challenge Program ranges from one and one-half months to six years.

The interview questions were developed in order to gather the information desired by the School District administration. A summary of the responses to each question is provided below.

Question #1. Does the Challenge Program benefit other students in the school?

Seven of the nine teachers answered yes. This program seems to act as a motivator for the other students since finished projects are often shared in some way with other classes either by teacher initiation or by students discussing their activities with classmates. There are also exchanges of ideas and materials between teachers in the Challenge Program and their colleagues, resulting in enrichment for greater numbers of students. There seems to be an example set by students in the program which provides an incentive for higher standards among other students and motivation of younger siblings to be selected for the program. Because there are some new and interesting materials available to the entire school, there appears to be less boredom among the rest of the students when provided the opportunity to work with them.

The negative comments, while few, are significant. It was noted that if other teachers are not supportive the program can be a disruptive influence in the school. It was also

pointed out that when siblings who plan to enter the program are not accepted dissension between school and home may result.

Question #2. Would extension of the Challenge Program into other grades be effective?

Since the program presently is in grades five and six the extension could go either direction or both. Six teachers were of the opinion that it could be placed earlier in the elementary school by providing in-class enrichment or even short pull-out programs. The only danger cited was the lack of maturity which might negate the benefits below grade four. Eight teachers said the program would have merit for junior high school students because it would be a needed challenge for some. These teachers suggested that one class for the entire junior high school would probably be the best approach and one teacher would rather see the program restricted to the language arts area. Those teachers opposed to the extension to junior high felt that the program had sufficient variety and there was already too much work.

Question #3. Are student evaluation procedures being followed?

There are several evaluation procedures recommended and for the most part these are being followed but the answers to this question focused on reporting procedures. Almost all teachers provide feedback to the students on an ongoing basis through comments on written assignments, checklists on research projects and verbal comments. There was unanimous use of the report card for Challenge students. Of interest is the fact that over half of the teachers devised their own report card for the November and March reporting periods since they believe the present forms do not provide sufficient, easily interpretable information to the parents. Parents said they like the teacher's reporting format better than the report card normally used. One teacher has sent out a letter to parents at the end of the school year which seems to be effective and appreciated by parents. However, all but one teacher will use the report card form provided by the system for the year end report.

In order to evaluate students' progress, teachers used a variety of methods but there seems to be room for improvement. Eight teachers used anecdotal records of student progress, collecting information from students, the home room teacher, and parents, while the one teacher who

didn't had been newly appointed but said she would use this approach if it is part of the program. Teachers find evaluating children objectively in this program quite difficult and have suggested that there is need for a more "rigid, structured, substantive procedure". It seems that teachers are willing to help develop a more well defined evaluation procedure.

Question #4. Do you teach differently in your homeroom class because you are a Challenge teacher?

Only six teachers said this question was applicable and four of these admitted that being a Challenge teacher had affected their total teaching behavior. It seems that they have allowed discussions to become more open-ended, they are more student centered and they are less directive. They share materials used with the Challenge class and often employ similar strategies and even their expectations of students are higher, which sometimes works to the disadvantage of some students. One teacher noted that she had always used less traditional methods and that was one reason she had been selected for the Challenge Program.

Question #5. Do you receive a complete file on each Challenge student?

All teachers except the one who had only been in the program for six weeks replied in the affirmative. This provides an overview of individuals in the class, including abilities, talents and interests which can be used to plan the curriculum. How much this information is actually used by the Challenge teachers to develop curricular activities is uncertain. A suggestion that could have some merit proposed the development of a file for each student that might contain a profile of interests, achievements and reported needs, which would be cumulative.

Question #6. Are the following objectives being met?

These are learning objectives taken from the Challenge Program. Almost all of the objectives are being met according to the teachers.

The first three relating to cognitive skills are being addressed in numerous ways by the Challenge teachers. Students often work together on projects so that students are exposed to different thinking styles. There are many activities to promote creative and divergent thinking such

as brainstorming, predicting the future, discussing alternative solutions to problems, as well as commercially prepared materials such as "Mind Benders" and "Think Tank", and "Logo" software for the computer. There was direct instruction and practice on generalizing and thinking divergently. There were units developed to promote evaluative and critical thinking skills such as, "Family Issues", "Justice", and debates on current issues in the local and national news which provided an opportunity for students to make decisions and deliberate alternatives in a friendly environment.

Students are learning to frame questions with clarity and specificity through instruction and practice with their peers. Students are helped to form appropriate questions for interviewing and research, they ask questions to classmates and receive feedback, and there is practice in interviewing other people.

Developing the ability to develop, share and express ideas clearly and fluently both orally and in writing is a natural outgrowth of the objective expressed in the previous paragraph. All teachers said this was being done in their classes. There was ample opportunity for oral communication in structured situations as well as in class discussions, small group interaction and debates. There have been several writing assignments including reports, writing ideas from video presentations, and creative writing projects such as stories, diaries, etc.

All teachers said their students are engaged in activities that develop proficient techniques of locating, gathering, organizing and reporting information. There are research projects utilizing the library facilities and other data sources. There have been computer programs used which help students understand the methods of collecting information as well. Each teacher has instructed students in organizing information and provided opportunities to practice the skills with meaningful assignments.

Another objective of the program is to develop the quality of perseverance. All but one teacher thought this was being accomplished. Students are first given challenging projects or questions that require extra effort and sometimes unusual methods. Teachers then encourage students to be independent in their work and push them to search in depth for solutions rather than be content with only a superficial treatment.

To have students listen to and work well with others is the objective of all teachers. This is accomplished through small group interaction, video recording of discussions

accompanied by a critique, freedom to select working partners, discussions that focus on accepting other views, etc. One teacher observed that this gets into the area of affective development which may be even more important in the program than work done in the cognitive area.

One area that seemed to be neglected was that of developing an understanding and respect for the importance of the interdependence of man, since only five of the nine teachers reported this being addressed. Some feel that it might be done through other activities though not taught directly. Examples of activities centered on this theme were discussions on the nuclear war, discussions of the Ethiopian crisis, discussions of the future and the implications of certain decisions on life, and discussions about our interdependence on each other.

All teachers were helping students learn to base decisions on an investigation of alternatives and consideration of their possible consequences. Some activities that promote this objective are the futures unit, creative problem solving exercises, brainstorming, "Olympics of the Mind", decision-making unit, and "Think Tank".

While the way teachers responded to the questions indicates they believe these objectives are being addressed, the researchers are not certain that each objective is planned. In other words, one activity may pertain to several objectives when it is considered in retrospect. It may be that more sophisticated evaluation information would reveal the accuracy of these suppositions.

Question #7. List benefits of the Challenge Program to the whole class and to individual students.

It was difficult to attribute most of the benefits to the class as a whole since the responses seemed to concentrate on the gains made by children. The classes seemed to have more freedom than might be expected in the regular classrooms and there was an accepting atmosphere for idea expression as well as for personal idiosyncrasies. The students could openly discuss any topic which concerned them and thus were not confined to the curriculum of the day. Teachers often felt more relaxed and open, allowing them to assume a different role than they and the students were accustomed to.

Each student will have benefited in a unique way which cannot be assessed but generalizations can be made and in some instances specific examples are citable. One of the

most common gains seemed to be an increase in self-confidence and self-esteem. There was an increase in tolerance on the part of each student and a respect for other's opinions. A shy student is now more outgoing and comfortable in the class. Some have developed their abilities further such as leadership skill, logical thinking, communication skill and creative talents. There has been a move toward more independence on the part of several students and an ability to define a problem and work towards a solution on the part of others. Most teachers concluded that the greatest benefits of the Challenge Program are probably in the affective domain.

Question #8. Identify the needs of students or of the class as a whole, how the needs were identified or who identified the need (source), how these needs are being met and the observable student outcomes.

There were six sources through which student needs could come to the attention of the teacher. These sources are listed in order of frequency from most often cited to least.

Classroom Observation

Home Room Teacher

Parents

Counselor

Identification Procedure

Other (includes school office, central administration office, former Challenge Teacher)

Most teachers said they could identify a need for each student in the class and a resulting list showed that 98% of the students were accounted for. The following examples illustrate the responses received with this item.

1. One student experienced some difficult home problems which had left her withdrawn and she needed a place to relax emotionally. The teacher made sure the student felt comfortable in class and had lots of support and encouragement as well as humor. No fuss was made if the child didn't want to talk or participate in class. Gradually the teacher and the rest of the students made the girl feel accepted and safe, resulting in dramatic changes as she came out of her shell.

2. A student identified as a potential dropout, but eligible for the Challenge Program, needed to have a voice in the curriculum. He has been allowed to have input into his activities in the class and to find his "own space". He wandered around at first dabbling with one project and then another. He is now much more attentive and interested in school and has produced some great work.

3. Another student had difficulty in expressing himself orally. In the unit on biographies the students were required to research the person selected and make an oral presentation in front of the class and video camera. There was encouragement from the class members for this particular student and he was allowed to present only when he felt ready and comfortable. The improvement over the previous year was considered to be extraordinary.

4. It was felt that one whole class needed to improve listening and discussion skills. The teacher established an orderly system for discussion and made sure each student listened to each presenter. Everyone was encouraged to express their opinion but at the same time to respect the opinions of their classmates. There now appears to be much higher quality in the discussions.

There is a serious attempt to meet the special needs of each student in the Challenge Program and also to meet the needs of each class as a whole. It appears that most success stories deal with the affective rather than the cognitive.

Question #9. Describe involvement in the identification and selection procedures.

The Challenge teachers' involvement in the identification process was as expected by the school district but not always by choice. They were involved with helping regular classroom teachers in the school carry out the procedure and make recommendations, except in two cases where the Challenge teachers were not in the system last year.

Question #10. Comments of teachers

The teachers made several comments about the program and some of their concerns. There is a feeling that the program could be expanded to accommodate more students. If there were more students then some "special needs" classes could

be established. There needs to be more flexibility in the program to meet the special interests of students in such areas as mathematics, art, etc. There seem to be some problems in the selection process since one principal ignored the recommendations of the teachers and placed students which he chose in the program. Most of the teachers are in favor of the program but there is the feeling from some that more life needs to be injected somehow. The coordinator was given a vote of confidence because of her hard work and attention to the needs of all participants in the program.

2. COUNSELOR INTERVIEWS

There were eight counselors (one was absent) interviewed from the nine schools. All of these professionals seem to be well qualified with the professional counseling certificate and program testing credentials. There is a counselor for each school, though not necessarily full time. Each counselor was asked to comment with respect to the following items.

Question #1. Verify the use of the following identification procedures.

Counselors and the Program coordinator confirmed that the procedures outlined by the district were being followed, though not always in the same order as suggested. Teachers and sometimes others make a referral by completing a teacher referral form. It includes information about the child in a number of different areas. The form is standard throughout the county. They also use report card marks from one or two years. Group I.Q. is administered in the school system and the WISC-R is administered to all those candidates who are recommended. There is a CAT test, the Renzulli - Hartman, which really forms part of the teacher referral, and is filled out by the teacher. The section on work habits, social maturity and attitude is a very subjective evaluation done by the home room teacher and reported to the counselors. The "interest in Challenge Program" section and the creativity form are completed by the student under the direction of the teacher. All of this information is gathered together by the counselor and is summarized on a form which the county provides, called an information summary form. It has room for all the information just described, as well as room for comments and notes on that student.

There are some "other" procedures used for identification when more information is deemed necessary. There have been occasions when parents were consulted and in one school this seems to be an accepted practice. One counselor has found it useful to discuss the procedure of identification individually with teachers rather than rely solely on the forms because he is able to alert them to student behaviors which might otherwise be overlooked. Another counselor interviews students and uses tests which add information not provided by the WISC-R and some other measures normally used in the process.

The final procedures involve preparation of a school priority list and then selection of candidates by a committee. The priority list is prepared by a committee consisting of the school principal, counselor, and the teachers. The selection of candidates is made by a committee consisting of the coordinator, principals from the schools involved (where there are more than one), school counselor(s), and someone from pupil services.

Counselors believe the identification and selection processes are carried out as outlined but offered some interesting insights. One counselor is of the opinion that there are far more students who could qualify than can be accommodated. There seem to be more subjective judgements made than some counselors feel are justified by the standardized test scores. In some schools it seems that every recommended candidate is selected because there are more spaces available than children, while in other centers several may be denied a place because there is insufficient room.

Question #2. Do you make any assessment of student needs?

Four of the eight counselors answered in the affirmative and one was unsure, leaving three who said no. They make assessments in a general way but not specifically, however they could provide more information on student needs if requested. It seems that only the more prominent or obvious strengths and weaknesses of the students are reported and that more could be done in this area.

Question #3. Are the special needs or abilities of unsuccessful but suitable candidates reported to the principal and the home room teacher?

To this question there were three "yes" answers and three "no" answers with the remaining two declining comment because it was not applicable to them at this time. In one case a parent was given information and it seems that two counselors do occasionally discuss the information with a teacher.

Question #4. Does the Challenge teacher ask for more information or assistance regarding students (needs) in the Challenge Program?

Half of the counselors said that teachers ask for more information about the students. This may cover a number of

areas both general and specific but it seems that there is not the spontaneous flow of information and interaction which could be expected to occur.

Question #5. Would extension of the program into other grades be effective?

All counselors answered in the affirmative but one was interested in seeing it extended upward to the junior high school only. There are some very bright youngsters who need to be challenged but must wait until grade five and these need some attention so as not to be stunted in their creative and academic development. A caution was registered about children becoming bored when they have the program for more than three years because the material tends to be repetitious. Generally the counselors were positive about extensions of the program.

Question #6. Are there benefits to other students in the school because of the Challenge Program?

Six of the counselors thought this was the case and one was not sure as she is quite new to the scene. There seems to be a positive motivating influence on other students because they look to the Challenge students as examples. The Challenge students enrich other classes with their comments and projects and there is a sharing of the materials with other classes by the Challenge teacher. In-service has helped all teachers and sometimes the Challenge teacher is instrumental in giving assistance to other teachers.

Question #7. Comments or recommendations on any aspect of the program.

Generally the counselors were quite supportive of the Challenge Program. They thought it was advantageous to provide for students endowed with extra ability but there was some doubt about the emphasis of the program. There was a desire to make sure the philosophy and practice mesh together. There seems to be support for having the identification procedure begin earlier and some believe there should be modifications as well. There is support from this group to develop a program to meet other needs of gifted students.

3. PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWS

Principals from the nine schools were interviewed to determine their sentiments about the Challenge Program. Questions which seemed to reflect the information required for the study were developed by the research team. The questions are provided below with a summary of the comments.

Question #1. Are needs of unsuccessful Challenge candidates being met?

Of the nine principals interviewed, five felt that these students' needs were being met in a general way, two did not, one was unsure, and one said there were no such students in his school this year. With only one exception, no specific assessment of the needs of the suitable, but unsuccessful candidates was made. The principals felt that as the school was concerned with the needs of a large number of students, the needs of the small number of unsuccessful candidates would also be met by the various school programs. Many of the schools have enrichment programs, activities and clubs which should involve these students.

Question #2. Are student evaluation procedures being followed?

Responses for the five parts of this question were as follows:

a. Challenge class report card. Eight answered yes, one answered no.

b. Student input. All nine principals answered yes.

c. Home room teacher input. Nine answered yes.

d. Parent input. Nine answered yes.

e. Anecdotal record. Six answered yes, three were unsure.

f. Other. Seven answered yes, two answered no. Examples of these "other" evaluation procedures were given, with the most frequently mentioned being that of maintaining close contact with parents. Interviews with parents are held twice a year, or as appropriate, to exchange information about the students. The students are also given

verbal evaluations on an ongoing basis. Challenge teachers meet with home room teachers regularly to inform them of the progress of the students.

Principals had a variety of comments concerning the evaluation procedures, with one suggesting that conferences with parents could replace report cards. It was felt that Challenge teachers should meet with home room teachers prior to issuing each report card so that they could both have input. Even though the principals were not familiar with all the details of the evaluation procedures, they were aware of what was being done in their schools, felt that it was important, and were generally pleased with the procedures.

Question #3. Does the Challenge Program benefit other students in your school?

Eight of the nine principals felt that there were benefits to the rest of the school. Several of them mentioned that the special resource materials for the Challenge Program are available for all teachers in the school to use. The teachers are all aware of the program and are influenced to teach better. They are positive and supportive toward the enrichment programs. Challenge students are encouraged to share their experiences and information with their regular classes. This is a positive influence on all the students. One principal said that the image of the school in the community was improved because of the Challenge Program.

Question #4. Would extension of Challenge Program into other grades be effective?

Six of the principals were in favor of extending the program into some of the lower grades in elementary school, and seven favored extension upwards into junior high school.

Many were wary of involving grades one and two in the program and felt that they could get enrichment in their regular classes. There is also a problem of too much repetition if a student is in the class too long. The younger students should not be included in classes with older students because of the emotional and social differences. Some principals wanted it for all grades. They felt that students who are capable and need the extra challenge should be provided with it, and that teachers should have more time to provide it.

There were differing opinions as to the programs' inclusion in junior high school, ranging from just grade seven, just grades eight and nine, to all grades. One suggested that it could be an option offered two or three times per week, while others thought that most students in junior high have problems just handling the regular program, without being "different" from their peers.

The general feeling among those in favor of extending the program was that it was important to have sufficient resources of money, materials and teachers, and that teachers have the time needed to plan and coordinate.

Question #5. Describe involvement in identification and selection procedures.

All nine of the principals had attended the two meetings specified in the system handbook. They were: 1. a meeting with the counselor and teachers in their school to establish a priority list, and 2. a selection committee meeting with program coordinator, other schools involved, counselors, and a representative from pupil services.

The principals are involved in identification and selection in various other ways. At the beginning of the year some of them talk with their staff about the Challenge Program, help them better understand the nature of giftedness and how to identify it. They review standardized test results and recommend students to be tested further, and they consult with teachers about potential students prior to the teachers making recommendations. One mentioned that he watches students from the time they are in grade one and is aware of their abilities.

Question #6. Comments or recommendations on any aspects of the program.

There was a variety of comments regarding the Challenge Program. Several principals wanted to have a program in every school (over 250 population) and eliminate having feeder schools. Most of them praised their Challenge teachers but some thought more outside resources and specialists in various areas could enhance the program. One wanted a more established program, while still allowing for teacher differences, but it was noted that students become bored if the same program is repeated each year. There should be more done for those students who were qualified but unsuccessful in getting into the program. Some of the schools have enrichment programs, with varying degrees of

success. One principal noted that it is important to let the public know what the Challenge Program is about.

There was a lot of support in all the schools by the principals, and no major concerns. If the program is to be expanded they want to have sufficient time, money, and personnel to provide a good program.

4. CURRENT STUDENT INTERVIEWS

Thirty students currently in the Challenge Program were interviewed. There were three from grade four, ten from grade five, and seventeen from grade six.

Question #1. What benefits do you think you receive from being in the Challenge Program?

The responses given by the students were divided into the affective and the cognitive areas. In the affective area nineteen different benefits were listed, with many being common to several students. The most popular response was making new friends, listed by nine of the students. Other benefits listed were as follows:

- meeting students from other schools,
- increased self-confidence, not so shy,
- learned to express self better,
- it's fun,
- learned to get along with people better,
- learned that boys are human after all,
- liked being with other kids who are like me, (a popular response)
- I felt more comfortable in school,
- I got to miss classes I don't like,
- I have a better attitude toward school now, it's fun, not boring,
- I understand the opinions and points of view of others,
- free to express ideas, not bothered by what others will think of them,
- found that failing was not a terrible thing, but a learning process,
- was accepted even if I didn't know the answers, was able to ask lots of questions,

- treated better by regular classroom teacher,

- I'm proud because I was only one from grade four,

- everyone helps each other in class,

- the teacher always helps with projects, gives encouragement and support.

In the cognitive area there were fourteen different responses, with the most common being, I learned new things. Other answers were as follows:

- learned how to talk and express self better,

- learned to give better written and oral reports, used video to help them,

- doing different and interesting things,

- understand politics,

- critical thinking unit helped in regular classrooom work,

- stretched minds,

- increased thinking skills,

- improved creativity,

- enjoyed art,

- enjoyed photography,

- liked learning about Leonardo da Vinci,

- learned things that will be useful in later life.

When the students were asked how they felt about themselves, almost all indicated that they felt proud to be in the program. They had increased feelings of self-confidence and self-worth, and one boy indicated that he thought he could be of benefit to others. One child had problems at home and had negative feelings about the program.

The students were asked to tell if there were any disadvantages to being in the program. Six of them said there were no disadvantages but twenty students said they have to catch up on work missed in regular classes. Other disadvantages mentioned were that other students think the

children in the Challenge Program are different and they get teased, friends are sometimes jealous, and fun things in regular classes are missed.

The students were asked to list some of the activities they had participated in through the Challenge Program. They all listed "Olympics of the Mind". Other activities mentioned in descending order of frequency were the orientation unit, mind benders, Think Tank, creative problem solving, worksheets, puzzles, brain teasers, field trips, computers, photography, log book, drama, cultural awareness, archeology, class discussions, and video taping of presentations.

The book of guidelines published by the county describes the Challenge Program with activities and curriculum being broken into four areas. They are orientation or foundation, individual development, group enrichment activities, and independent study. From the broad range of activities listed by the students it appears that each school has had activities which would fit into these four areas.

Question #2. List your likes and dislikes in the Challenge Program. Rate the Program.

The information on likes and dislikes was not really relevant. Twenty-seven of the students said they liked the program a lot, while three said it was average. Most of the students appear to have a great deal of interest in and appreciation for the Challenge Program.

Question #3. Are you treated differently in other classes because you are in the Challenge Program?

To this question eight of the children replied that they are treated differently, while twenty-two said they are not. Most of the different treatment is from the regular teachers who seem to expect more of the students, allow them to do more activities, treat them nicer, have more trust in them, and use them to help answer other students' questions. One reply was negative in that the student feels left out of regular classes because his teacher thinks he knows all the answers and doesn't call on him in class. Other comments were that students in regular classes seem to expect more of Challenge students and are sometimes taken aback by them and don't talk freely to them.

Question #4. Would you like to see the program extended?

With reference to elementary school, twenty-three said yes, and seven said no. Some thought it should start in grade one because they were bored in the early grades. However, other students thought grade three was a better grade to start in because you need grades one and two to get used to school. Some were concerned that not all ages should be grouped together.

Twenty-eight of the students wanted the Challenge Program extended into junior high school, with two against it, and two wanted it to go into high school. One of the students who said no was worried about being teased by others in junior high. Some of the positive comments were that it gives a lot of self-confidence and that it should be expanded to include more children.

Generally the students' response to the Challenge Program is excellent. They enjoy the relaxed atmosphere and the freedom to talk more. Teachers are well prepared and provide marvelous opportunities for them to do different things. There were also some worries about being teased, and that other students expect them to know everything, or that others think it is just fun and not work. Some would like the program expanded and girls especially wanted more girls in it.

5. FORMER STUDENT INTERVIEWS

Fifteen students, five in each of grades seven, eight, and nine, who had been in the program previously were interviewed. Their comments were not unlike those who are currently enrolled and thus were very supportive of the program. The benefits they cited were mostly in the affective domain rather than the cognitive with the main thought being increased confidence in themselves.

Eleven of the students would like to see the program extended to the junior high school because it would provide a needed challenge and make the work more interesting. One even thought it should be extended to the high school. The majority were not in favor of the program being extended below grade four.

The memories of the students were positive. They respected their teachers and remember them as exceptional people. They enjoyed the activities and especially mentioned the field trips. One student in retrospect said the program took away the pressure of making grades yet gave a sense of achievement and accomplishment while expanding her horizons and perspective of the world.

6. INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS OF CURRENT AND FORMER STUDENTS

It was decided to interview a sample of parents of students currently enrolled in the program as well as a few parents of students who had been in the program previously. There were 18 parents interviewed from the former group and 11 from the latter group for a total of 29. There were more benefits cited by parents with children currently enrolled in the program, probably because the other group had forgotten much of what had happened.

Question #1. What are the benefits to your child from the Challenge Program?

There were many positive comments about the program. The most often cited benefit was an increase in the self-confidence of the child, rendering them less shy and timid. Students seemed more able to express themselves and were more comfortable with their peers as well as adults. Because the children received recognition for their abilities there seemed to be an increase in enthusiasm for school resulting in higher marks in other classes. Parents thought their children were able to think more precisely and logically and were better organized. There was an observable difference in the understanding of classmates and acceptance of idiosyncrasies. Parents even noticed an increase in the creative aspects of the children's behavior.

When asked about the disadvantages of the program, parents had few comments. There was some ostracism and teasing from their classmates. One student nearly quit because the homework load was too strenuous, especially when teachers required the student to complete assignments missed while in attendance at the Challenge class. Two parents said there were special problems when the children had to go to another school because they missed classes and activities in their own school and with their regular playmates.

Question #2. Does your child keep a record or log of activities in the program?

Only three parents said this was happening.

Question #3. Would extension of the program be effective?

There was overwhelming support of this idea both for the elementary school and for the junior high school. It was

felt that the children need to be challenged and develop work habits commensurate with their abilities, which does not normally happen in the regular classrooms. There was more support for the program to be extended to the junior high because parents believe there is greater need for the students to be motivated at this level.

Question #4. Did you receive a Challenge Class report card?

There was only one negative answer from all of the parents. They found the information helpful and that the comments of teachers seemed insightful. The parent interviews were of the most help according to some parents. There were some parents who thought the comments from the teacher about their children were quite general.

Question #5. Comments, opinions and recommendations.

There was support for the program and most said it should be continued and expanded if possible. There were several parents who expressed a desire to be more involved with the program so that they knew more about the curriculum and the activities. There were some who wanted to have French as part of the curriculum and some who wanted to have the program cater to other aspects of giftedness such as visual art, music, drama, etc. There was the idea expressed that more students should be allowed to benefit from such a program by having one group for half the year and then another group. Overall it seemed that the parents were happy to have the Challenge Program for their children and eager to have it continue.

IV SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. How effective is the Challenge Program in meeting student needs?

This question presupposes that the needs of students are identified. One way to deduce needs is to analyze the objectives stated by the district, assuming they know what the needs are and have therefore used them in developing the objectives to be achieved. Needs may also be interpreted from statements made by the children, teachers, counselors, principals and parents interviewed but for the most part these participants tend to discuss benefits and disadvantages of the program. Stating needs based on statements of benefits may be an erroneous procedure since the strength of the relationship between the two is also assumed. While the foregoing is needed to avoid misinterpretation, it is necessary to answer the question using the data collected.

Based on the objectives as stated in the guidelines of the Challenge Program, students seem to have the following needs. They should develop the ability to think convergently, divergently and evaluatively as well as learn to think critically and distinguish fact from opinion. It is also necessary for students to learn to generalize and apply this in new and unusual situations. It seems that students need to learn to frame questions with clarity and specificity to help them in becoming proficient with techniques of locating, gathering, organizing and reporting information. Students also need to learn how to base decisions on the investigation of alternatives and their possible consequences. There is a need to express ideas clearly both orally and in writing. Students need to understand and respect the importance and interdependence of man. And finally students need to learn to persevere in a task.

Parents also expressed some needs of students. They said students in the Challenge Program need to be challenged and explore intellectually with their peers. These students

need to develop a realistic self-concept and increase in confidence. They also need to learn to express themselves.

There are undoubtedly many needs of the students in the Challenge Program just as there are in any program. Whether the teacher can meet the needs of every child is open to debate even if one could be assured that all needs were identified. It is safe to say that the teachers, counselors and others associated with the program have done their best to identify the special needs of these children. It is also safe to say that most teachers have tried to help students develop their special talents and abilities within the limitations of the program, which is primarily focused on the "academic" gifts rather than on the visual and performing arts. The affective needs are particularly addressed by teachers and they have repeatedly emphasized concern for this aspect of development and provided examples of their success. The benefits of the program as expressed by the various constituents is further testimony of the effectiveness of the Challenge Program in meeting student needs.

2. What are the benefits of the program to students? Are the benefits common to all students?

Counselors, students, former students and parents were asked to comment on the benefits of the Challenge Program. Most responses dealt with affective attributes.

Students were happy to have a relaxed atmosphere that encouraged cooperation and freedom of expression with acceptance of their ideas and individuality. This along with new activities helped to make school fun. Students acknowledged that they had become more critical in their thinking and had increased in their confidence and ability to achieve but had learned to cope well with failure because they understand it is a part of learning. By sharing their thoughts and feelings they have become comfortable with classmates and established new friendships. The crowning remark, even though there have been some frustrations, is summed up with 'I am proud to be in the Challenge Program'.

Former students too expressed satisfaction with the program. They cited an increase in confidence and an understanding of themselves as prime benefits of the program. They said learning to think was important to them as well as learning to be independent in school activities. New material made the program interesting and there was a resulting desire for more schooling. Many expressed how they had gained new friends as a result of the program.

Parents also saw many benefits of the program. They said interaction with peers in small groups and with a teacher who did not criticize allowed the students to feel comfortable in expressing themselves, resulting in greater self-confidence. In many cases there was an improvement of attitude toward school and overall improvement in school grades. Students seemed to have learned to be more independent and responsible in studying and thinking through everyday problems. Some parents noted that their children were better organized and even more patient. While some of these characteristics might be attributed to maturity, parents are supportive of the program and few had negative comments.

Counselors were not as demonstrative in their comments, partly because they are somewhat removed. Several noted that once the identification was completed they seldom were involved, except when a teacher had a specific question or needed to have a child counselled. They were generally supportive of the program but did not provide specific benefits beyond what has already been stated.

3. How are the needs of unsuccessful candidates being met?

This question was addressed to the principals. Most of them responded that nothing special was being done beyond what was provided for all students. There are special clubs and activities which could meet these needs. They noted that enrichment was a part of each classroom and all students could be involved depending on the existing circumstances. There was a suggestion that a teacher should be assigned to help meet the needs of those students who were not selected.

4. What extensions of the program are viable?

This question was directed at all of those interviewed in an attempt to determine whether they thought the program should be extended to include grades below five and above six. There was strong support for the idea of extension to grade four and into the junior high school. There was some resistance to offer the program below grade four as most felt the students had enough to challenge them and they were too immature to take advantage of the program without major modifications.

The reasons given for extending the program mainly dealt with providing further challenge to able students. The reasons were not different from those provided in the

benefits of the program. This was true for extensions in both directions.

Those more cautious expressed some concern about extending the program. The most prevalent comment was related to boredom. It was felt that if a person were in the program for too long (three years) there would be repetition, leading to apathy and indifference. There was also the idea expressed that junior high might already have too much homework and thus such a program could be burdensome. For those below grade four there was concern about immaturity socially and emotionally which could lead to further problems. Several expressed concern about resources needed to accommodate more children.

5. Further comments and suggestions.

Parents, children, and school personnel have expressed strong support for the Challenge Program. It seems to be meeting a need in the district. It appears to be well organized and operating smoothly with cooperation at all levels with only minor complaints.

There were some comments and suggestions which might be worth noting. There were some interviewees who expressed a desire to have a program which would address the talent areas such as visual art, music, drama, etc. as well as that already in place. While there seems to be some cooperation among teachers of the Challenge Program and other teachers on staff when special expertise is required, there was a feeling that more could be done. This might also act to reduce some negative feelings toward this program which appear to be present in the system. There was also the suggestion that the Challenge teachers should be rotated more often to provide a chance for other talented teachers and also bring new life to the program. (While this latter suggestion is accurately reported it should be noted that there has been considerable turnover in the teaching staff over the course of the Challenge Program.)

The identification process was generally accepted by all participants but some responses suggest that the area should be explored further. Some counselors and a few others seem to favor earlier identification in order to select the candidates more accurately. There is some resentment engendered when teachers perceive that a child is invited to participate in the program because of a "pushy principal" even though the criteria for admission have not been met. There is probably a need for more communication among the participants to avoid misunderstandings.

A few counselors suggested that more "whole class" counseling sessions should be held to help students having adjustment struggles. Many school districts have found it difficult for students to readily adjust to the new expectations of special programs for the gifted and have instituted such sessions as a regular part of the program.

The one comment from students which should be addressed relates to the amount of work required of them. They noted that the Challenge classes were very interesting and that they worked hard but they resented being required to catch up on work missed in their regular classes. This is a common complaint of children in pull-out programs and can usually be alleviated if there is more communication with the regular teachers by the school administration.

V RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Program Extension

Several participants interviewed made this suggestion. Students who had been in the Challenge Program felt they would have benefited from an extension into the junior and senior high school. Some parents believe their children would have benefited from the opportunity to begin the program earlier.

The development of creativity is important to all children and enhances the education of gifted children. All major definitions of giftedness include creativity as a necessary component and the theoretical concepts on which programs are built use it as one of two or three foundation stones. For the very gifted, failure to realize their creative potential may result in frustration as well as a lack of productivity. Three stages of development pertinent to creativity and relevant to this recommendation are: 1) creative fantasy, (approximately ages four to six), 2) a creativity drop which can be avoided (approximately ages seven to eleven), and 3) increased verbal creativity, (approximately ages twelve to eighteen). Because of these stages, creativity concerns provide a reason for re-examining the Challenge Program and making extensions into the earlier and subsequent grades.

How soon to begin a program for gifted children is open to debate but there are many where the students are identified in kindergarten. There does not seem to be any information in the literature, nor from the personal contacts with specialists made by the authors of this report, to suggest that children are adversely affected by early identification and special treatment. There are questions as to the accuracy of identification and there are those who believe there is sufficient challenge for the child in the first two years of school, but for some children this has meant the difference between a satisfying school experience and a boring one. Much depends on the type of program provided. The most common procedure is to identify children in their second or third year and start them in a program for the gifted the following September.

How long to continue programs for the gifted is also variable. The length of time seems to depend more on financial considerations than on any other factor. It is common to have programs extended through the junior high school years. Some districts do not have special programs in the senior high school but prefer to offer several levels of the academic subjects, even extending into what might be considered first-year university courses as well as providing numerous options. In such cases self-selection into the courses seems to be the mode. Other districts are quite content to let the normal high school offering suffice and allow the student an opportunity to advance through the grades at a pace commensurate with ability and desire. Districts that have singled out the gifted individual for special treatment in the high school grades have reported positive comments from students and parents.

Recommendation: That the Challenge Program be extended in both directions from its current grades of five and six and that the role of creativity in these extensions as well as in the current program be given increased attention.

2. Visual and Performing Arts

While the Challenge Program has tried to address some of the needs of gifted children in this area, there is room for more. This program, like most, is weighted toward the academic and does not address the gifted who need development in the arts. It should be recognized however that modifying the curriculum to accommodate the arts might subsequently have an influence on changing the selection procedure in order to identify students especially gifted in these areas.

Recommendation: That the program give more attention to identification of and making provision for the education of children gifted in the visual and performing arts.

3. Focus on Student Outcomes

Obviously a strength of the Challenge Program and the basis for much of the satisfaction expressed by students, parents and teachers is the emphasis on the cognitive domain. However, an examination of the affective outcomes would provide a basis for better serving the support and affirmation needs of gifted children in the age group served. These children tend to be extraordinarily idealistic and have a keen sense of social conscience and moral judgement, both of which need to be addressed. By

focusing attention on the realm of human experience relating to emotions and feelings, the Board and administrators would add an important extension to their base of information for decision making. The catalytic effect on education in regular classes would also likely be beneficial.

Recommendation: That student outcomes in the affective domain be made a specific focus in the next internal evaluation of the Challenge Program.

4. Concerns of Administrators, Teachers, and Parents

There seems to have been ample effort expended to listen to the concerns of parents and even students but there appeared to be an undercurrent of dissatisfaction within the professional group which had not received sufficient attention. This may be remedied through in-service education and by providing all parties with a vested interest in the Challenge Program an opportunity to contribute to the questions to be answered in future evaluations. The comments made in this regard are not to deny the work done in in-service and that planned for the future or the insight provided to the evaluators in the early stages of this project, but rather it suggests that more seems to be warranted in both areas.

Recommendation: That a mechanism be established to address the questions and concerns of administrators and teachers as well as parents.